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SUBJECT: TURKEY MAKES GOOD PROGRESS WITH LIMITED RESOURCES  
ON WETLANDS

1. Summary. With 71 wetlands of "international importance," 175 lowland wetlands and 1,000 alpine wetlands, Turkey hosts one of the most significant collections of wetlands in Europe and the Middle East. The development of its first five-year national plan and the implementation of its first wetlands regulation represent recent impressive progress in Turkey's wetlands management. GOT also established a national commission and blocked several projects that would have negatively affected its wetlands. But the missing elements are huge -- private sector involvement and sufficient funding to implement plans. End summary.

#### Four Milestones in Wetlands Management

2. Turkey became a party to the "Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat" in 1994 and has made impressive progress in the past 15 months, achieving four important milestones.

-- (1) Turkey has completed its first National Wetlands Strategy Plan, covering 2003-08. Developed in cooperation with four ministries (Environment, Forestry, Culture, Agriculture), the State Water Works (DSI), and NGOs (WWF/Turkey, Bird Researches Association), the strategy won praise from the Ramsar Secretariat for its emphasis on interagency cooperation and for being one of the first national strategic policy documents focused strictly on wetlands. Actively engaged in plan development, WWF/Turkey finds the plan quite fair in assigning responsibilities among stakeholders and in setting realistic and supportable objectives. (Comment. The plan's principle drawback is that it continues the practice of precluding the private sector from participating in developing wetlands management plans. End comment.)

-- (2) Effective January 2002, Turkey enacted Wetlands Protection Regulation that set out guidelines for wetlands protection and use. What is most remarkable is that Turkey has stopped several projects proposed by powerful ministries (DSI, Agriculture) that would have harmed protected wetlands. Among the blocked projects are the drainage of 12,000 hectares (ha) in Kizilirmak River basin near Samsun, the irrigation of 48,000 ha in Beysehir Lake (Konya and Isparta), and the construction of an international harbor in Izmir's Gediz Delta. Other projects have been sent back to the drawing board, including a DSI project that would have negatively affected the ecological integrity of Lake Seyfe near Kirsehir, water flow plans for the Sultan Marshes in Kayseri, and water plans for Lake Kus near Balikesir.

-- (3) Turkey established a 12-member National Wetlands Commission, as required in its wetlands regulations. MOE heads the Commission whose members include the general directors of government ministries, important NGOs and academics. MOE believes that such a high level commission will resolve conflicting interests among concerned organizations.

-- (4) Turkey has designated 71 of its wetlands as "internationally important" following Ramsar criteria for fish and waterfowl. These designations bolster recognition of Turkey as host to one of the most significant collections of wetlands in Europe and the Middle East. In addition, Turkey has nine designated Ramsar sites ("Ramsar designations" are awarded to those sites with internationally significant ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology.) Fulfilling the requirements of its wetlands regulations, GOT has identified protection areas and buffer zones for many of the country's 250 lowland and more than 1,000 alpine wetlands, many of which are barely even mapped.

## Ramsar to Open Regional Center in Turkey

13. WWF told us that the Ramsar Secretariat described Turkey's regulations and its strategic plan as "models" for other countries because they add management techniques unique to Turkey to Ramsar's recommended global management system. Turkey will host the important international Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative meeting in Izmir in June. Following the meeting, MOE and Ramsar Secretariat will open a Regional Ramsar Center to serve Turkey, the Caucasus and Central Asian Countries.

## Turkey's Wetlands Players

14. In addition to the National Wetlands Commission, three institutions are actively engaged in Turkey's wetlands issues.

-- (1) MOE. Through its Directorate General for Environmental Protection, the MOE is Turkey's designated Ramsar authority.

-- (2) NGOs. NGOs, such as WWF, have taken the lead in encouraging local communities to use wetlands wisely, a particularly welcomed educational function that complements a GOT-produced wetlands documentary. (Comment. Turkey's engaging NGOs in wetlands activities is not surprising. It follows Turkey's recognition for its "Worldwide Best Practice" for effectively engaging civil society institutions in the development of its WSSD report. End Comment.)

-- (3) DSI. As the agency responsible for water supply and distribution, DSI is clearly the most influential water agency in Turkey. DSI pressed to be the deciding voice in wetlands planning during the early stages of the regulation's implementation, despite MOE's official Ramsar designation and GOT's own requirement that wetlands regulations be prepared in coordination among ministries, local authorities and others. However, the National Wetlands Commission succeeded in deflecting the potential imbalance of power.

## Wetlands: Their Threats and Resources

15. The primary threat to wetlands in general is potential destruction of delicate hydrologic balance. The greatest potential offenders are water suppliers and users. In Turkey, these are potentially DSI, the Ministry of Rural Affairs, municipalities, local water users associations (irrigation), and water companies. Pollution (domestic, industrial, agricultural) and habitat destruction are other destructive influences. Anthropogenic activity, another threat, has all but destroyed the alpine wetlands in parts of eastern Anatolia.

16. Even with hundreds of wetlands in its territory, the GOT has only three wetlands management plans (Goksu Delta, Manyas Lake, Uluabat Lake) in effect. The MOE aims to develop and implement two to three additional wetlands plans per year. However, as a non-implementing agency, the MOE has no funding for this purpose and instead relies entirely on outside sources to fund the \$65 - 75,000 it typically costs to develop wetlands plans over the course of two years. France and the Netherlands are currently partially funding two new wetlands plans (Gediz Delta, Burdur Lake). Implementation can be hugely costly as well, addressing biology, sociology, biodiversity and other wetlands elements. Turkey has identified future priorities -- Kizilirmak Delta, Seyfe Lake, Sultan Marshes, Hazar Lake and the Meric Delta -- but has not earmarked funding to address their needs. In addition to an absence of funding, expertise within the MOE is limited.

## Transboundary Projects on the Horizon

17. Turkey has several potential opportunities for cross-border cooperation: with Georgia (at Aktas Lake), Armenia (a mountain wetlands), and Greece (the Meric Delta, a Ramsar site on the Greek side of the border). WWF/Georgia is working on an eco-regional, transboundary conservation project involving Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Iran. Although a transboundary Ramsar designation could be achieved within five years, it is unclear if Turkey has implemented the legal requirements to support transboundary protection. However, the plan proposes adding a transboundary Ramsar site and a cooperative transboundary management program to wetlands programming. It is projected that the transboundary site to be selected will be one shared with Georgia.

Comment

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18. Effective wetlands management requires a high level, long-term commitment. The on-again, off-again merger of ministries of Environment and Forestry has reduced momentum somewhat on wetlands development but not deterred the MOE team from pushing forward. Although its first transboundary wetlands management proposal is in the pipeline, Turkey still lacks sufficient funding and technical resources to implement its domestic programs. The opening of a Regional Ramsar Center later this year and Turkey's hosting a regional wetlands conference may bring much needed exposure, expertise and resources to Turkey's rich wetlands.

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